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Summary record of the 9th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 8 October 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair:	Mr. Saikal	(Afghanistan)
later:	Mr. Kováčik (Vice-Chair)	(Slovakia)
later:	Mr. Saikal (Chair)	(Afghanistan)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 29: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/73/38, A/73/263, A/73/266, A/73/285, A/73/294 and A/73/301)

1. **Ms. Lodhi** (Pakistan) said that the global commitment to advancing women's rights had created an environment in which women had greater opportunities and were more economically empowered. The meaningful participation of women in development activities was known to have a multiplier effect across the Sustainable Development Goals, from reducing poverty to improving public health and education standards.

2. Women had been active in Pakistani political and public life since the struggle for independence. Pakistan had elected the first woman Prime Minister in the Muslim world, and women had served as speakers of its national and provincial legislatures, as judges, as head of the Central Bank and as pilots and military officers. A party to many of the international instruments involving women's human rights, Pakistan had launched a national plan of action for women as a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace. Women's empowerment was a priority of the new Government's ambitious agenda, and half of its parliamentary secretaries were women.

3. **Ms. Andújar** (Dominican Republic) said that her country's National Development Strategy 2030 mainstreamed gender equality across all policies, plans and projects. The Dominican Republic promoted gender equality through, inter alia, equal pay policies, technology training for women, paid parental leave and legal and policy frameworks for ending sexual harassment in the workplace. To boost opportunities for women, her Government was implementing the Gender Equality Seal for Public and Private Enterprises and had launched a web portal for women entrepreneurs. The Ministry of Women operated a health education centre for adolescents with comprehensive services including sexuality education and information on pregnancy prevention, as well as a 24-hour domestic violence hotline. Furthermore, Dominican schools were working to changes boys' attitudes about masculinity. In order to improve data and statistics on equality, the Dominican Republic had recently established a national gender equality observatory that would collect and analyse data on women's employment, education, health and other areas. In closing, she commended the Secretary-General for having achieved gender parity in United Nations leadership and welcomed the election of the fourth woman President of the General Assembly.

4. **Mr. Molina Linares** (Guatemala) said that his delegation welcomed the election of María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés as President of the General Assembly and looked forward to the upcoming Security Council open debate on women, peace and security, which demonstrated the high importance that Member States attached to that topic. On the basis of the recommendations contained in the 2017 concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/GTM/CO/8-9), Guatemala was working to improve women's access to justice and end impunity for offences against them, including femicide.

5. Noting his Government's attention to the technical aspects of its national strategy on women, he said that it faced daunting challenges for closing inequality and inequity gaps, especially in the case of rural women, many of whom were indigenous. Its public policy instruments included guidelines for strengthening women's capacities to participate in decision-making and politics. It was aware of the need to continue institutionalizing and harmonizing social protection policies, to develop and strengthen poverty reduction strategies and to develop policies for improving access to credit, technology, training and market information. In closing, he thanked the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for its continued assistance to government institutions and civil society.

6. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that his Government was committed to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the international obligations of Nicaragua under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

7. Women played a central role in the changes taking place in Nicaragua. Their increasing prominence in positions of leadership was due to sustained efforts to achieve gender equality and to implement the Constitution of Nicaragua and international treaties. For example, as a result of a law requiring the political parties to include equal numbers of men and women on their candidate lists, more than half of government officials and municipal office-holders were women. In addition, women and their families enjoyed a higher quality of life thanks to the "faith, family and community" model, and reduced maternal mortality had been achieved through the improvement of health care for rural women. The progress made by Nicaragua in closing the gender gap had been recognized internationally, including by the World Economic Forum.

8. **Mr. Shakirov** (Kazakhstan) said that his country had advanced rapidly since its independence in 1991 because women were an essential element of all its national plans. All government actions aimed to ensure women's equal rights to economic resources, education and health care, including reproductive health care, as well as to nutrition, social services, and ownership and control of land and other forms of property, with special attention to disabled, rural and ethnic women. However, like all countries in transition, Kazakhstan had an implementation gap, which it was trying to close through a number of programmes and services.

9. Kazakhstan was gradually moving towards gender-sensitive strategies. It aimed to empower women through education, economic empowerment and appropriate laws. Talented young women received scholarships to study at the world's top universities, and women outnumbered men in domestic universities. Access to microcredit continued to boost the number of women entrepreneurs, and growing numbers of women had been elected to government, parliamentary and academic office. Women were being trained and employed in new information and communications technologies. Kazakhstan had also enacted legislation to prevent and remedy violence against women, sexual abuse, trafficking in women and modern forms of slavery.

10. **Ms. Dev** (India) said that her country was proud that the first woman elected President of the General Assembly had been from India. It attached the utmost importance to the representation of women in decision-making positions and was moving from women's development to women-led development by reserving seats for women in local government. Empowerment of women was at the core of national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Women were the largest direct beneficiaries of government programmes for poor families, and growing numbers of women had bank accounts, which gave them and their families access to loans, social security benefits and insurance. A campaign had been launched to promote the value of the girl child. Mandatory paid maternity leave had recently been extended to 22 weeks, and organizations with 50 or more employees were now required to have a crèche. To promote women's participation in the economy, 50 million women had received free cooking gas connections, and more girls' toilets were being installed in schools.

11. With respect to violence against women, Indian law criminalized all forms of violence against them, including sexual harassment, voyeurism and stalking and sexual harassment, and provided one stop centres and helplines for vulnerable and battered women. India also had legal safeguards against child marriage and domestic violence, and steps were being taken to reserve one third of police force positions for women. Indeed, India had been the first country to deploy an all-women police unit as part of a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

12. Her delegation commended the achievement of gender parity in United Nations senior management and fully supported the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse in the Organization. India would remain at the forefront of multilateral action for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

13. **Mr. García Paz y Miño** (Ecuador) said that his country had a strong legal framework on women's rights, including a Constitution that recognized gender equality. In February 2018, that framework had been further strengthened by the entry into force of an organic law on violence against women. Moreover, Ecuador had recently withdrawn all of its reservations to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In keeping with the 2030 Agenda, his Government was implementing a national development plan that mainstreamed a gender perspective across its objectives, policies and guidelines and defined a coherent set of actions to improve the quality of women's lives in harmony with nature.

14. The Government of Ecuador was working to give women and men equal access to all levels of education and had incorporated a gender perspective in all public policies on health care. Its programmes to combat unemployment and underemployment addressed the reduction of pay gaps, and women were guaranteed parity with men under the organic law on electoral processes and political organizations. The Ecuadoran Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been the first in the region to adopt its own gender equality policy.

15. **Ms. Zappia** (Italy) said that, as the first woman Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations and a diplomat, she was committed to working with delegations to promote the advancement of women, which was an Italian international priority. Her delegation had taken an active part in negotiating the draft resolutions on child, early and forced marriage and on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation. In 2018, to translate its policies into action, Italy had increased its core funding for UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and had confirmed its contribution to the UNFPA-United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change.

16. Italy was a partner in the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, and, during its tenure on the Security Council, had promoted the inclusion of specific provisions to prevent and counter sexual violence in the mandates of peacekeeping missions. It was a member of the Secretary-General's circle of leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations; had signed the related voluntary compact and was the top contributor to the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In addition, it provided peacekeepers with a wide range of training modules, including one on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

17. The protection, empowerment and emancipation of women were core priorities of Italian development cooperation, which emphasized their rights, access to education, transformative role and entrepreneurial ability. Italy had supported all the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security and was promoting their implementation nationally and internationally.

18. **Ms. Zahir** (Maldives) said that, because of her country's egalitarian tradition, women had never experienced discrimination in school enrolment or employment and had always had the right to vote. They nevertheless faced significant challenges which Maldives was taking steps to address. The Employment Act guaranteed maternity leave and equal pay for equal work and prohibited the use of gender or marital status as a basis for terminating employment. The Gender Equality Act defined the responsibilities of the public sector, businesses, non-governmental organizations and other employers in regard to gender equality and non-discrimination against women and required the Government and political parties to ensure equal opportunities for women at all levels. For a number of years, the Government had required 30 per cent of seats on the boards of State-owned companies to be held be women. Maldives had strict laws to prevent violence against women and to protect victims of gender-based discrimination, and it had criminalized marital rape in 2014.

19. **Ms. Salim** (Afghanistan) said that an empowered and emboldened generation of women had emerged in Afghanistan. An all-girls robotics team had competed internationally in 2018, and almost 20 per cent of the candidates in the upcoming parliamentary election were women. Thanks to policies put in place since 2001, women represented more than a quarter of government employees. Her Government was continuing to promote the rights of women by fulfilling its global commitments on freedom from violence and access to education and health services, by implementing a national women's empowerment programme, by enforcing national laws on equal rights and protections and by advancing women in government and business.

20. A national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was being implemented, as a result of which women were actively involved in shaping the future of the country. Women's contribution to the peace and security of Afghanistan was more important than ever and the proportion of women on the High Peace Council had risen from 11 to 20 per cent.

21. Efforts to combat violence against women included the appointment of a Deputy Attorney General for Elimination of Violence against Women, the development of a national strategy on violence against women and the adoption of a law criminalizing their harassment. The Government had also recently launched a rural development project that would improve the living conditions of widows and poor women.

22. **Ms. Shlein** (Israel) said that Israeli artist Netta Barzilai's winning Eurovision entry, "Toy", had amplified the worldwide outcry against sexual harassment and violence. At the 12th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, held on 22 March 2017, Israel had introduced a draft resolution entitled "Preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace" (E/CN.6/2017/L.4) and had subsequently spearheaded the establishment of the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment.

23. Israel worked to promote women's rights and empowerment through bilateral and multilateral partnerships in various countries. Its cooperation and development agency offered courses for governmental and non-governmental organizations on providing support for women entrepreneurs. It also organized the International Women Leaders Conference.

24. **Ms. López Marcocchio** (Mexico), speaking as a youth delegate, said that women's advancement was impeded by structural barriers the world over. Her country's recent legislative elections, in which women had attained gender parity, demonstrated the effectiveness of proactive investment and affirmative action. In Mexico, more and more women were entering the armed forces, public security services and, more recently, United Nations peacekeeping operations. Moreover, recent legal reforms would lead to true structural and cultural change. Mexico had learned from other countries and successful programmes, and it had also shared its good practices.

25. At the multilateral level, Mexico recognized migrant women as agents of change in their countries of origin and destination, and it had sponsored the draft Human Rights Council resolution on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (A/HRC/38/L.1/Rev.1) which, inter alia, urged States to ensure women's bodily autonomy and right to decide freely on all matters relating to sexual and reproductive health. Her Government was also continuing its efforts to promote the agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, particularly with respect to women's access to justice; the importance of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders; and the importance of technology for rural women.

26. Mexico was concerned about the polarization of multilateral forums, which resulted in stagnation. In particular, it condemned the attacks on gender equality within the Third Committee. Mexico would continue to advocate for the right to reproductive and sexual health as an essential element of empowerment. Regarding the current session's focus on intersecting forms of discrimination, it was important to recognize all women's organizations and to enlist the support of men and boys.

27. Through its Global Centre of Excellence in Gender Statistics, established in cooperation with UN-Women, Mexico would continue working with the United Nations system and regional mechanisms to improve statistical systems and generate data and statistics to inform gender equality policies. She urged Member States to join forces on Sustainable Development Goal 5 because, according to current statistical trends, it would not be attained without more progressive multilateral action.

28. **Ms. Inanç Örnekol** (Turkey) said that the Turkish Constitution recognized women and men as equal and had been amended to introduce the concept of positive discrimination for vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities. Her Government remained committed to improving the living standards of women and girls and ensuring their full and equal participation in all spheres of life. It focused on preventing all forms of discrimination against them, combating violence against them and ensuring their empowerment. In March 2018, the Government had adopted a strategy paper and action plan on women's empowerment for the period 2018–2023, which would be implemented in cooperation with civil society, universities and the private sector.

29. Turkey saw UN-Women as a key institution and essential partner and was pleased to host its Europe and Central Asia Regional Office. It attached particular importance to progress on implementing the women, peace and security agenda as host to 4 million displaced persons. It was continuing to meet their humanitarian, education and health needs and to take robust measures to prevent trafficking in refugee women and girls, who had an important role to play in their countries' futures.

30. **Ms. Turner** (Jamaica) said that, as a member of the Group of Champions of Women's Economic Empowerment, Jamaica remained committed to gender equality, women's empowerment and compliance with the gender-related international instruments. In recognition of the ongoing need to strengthen its legislative and policy frameworks on violence against women and girls, her Government was currently reviewing its laws on domestic violence. It was also implementing an action plan to eliminate gender-based violence and had recently signed a memorandum of understanding with UN-Women for its funding. Her delegation was grateful to UN-Women and its other partners for their support and assistance.

31. To strengthen gender mainstreaming, Jamaica had established gender focal points across ministries, departments and agencies. In addition, 29 ministries, departments and agencies had received the gender equality certification seal for promoting gender equality in the workplace. The Government was working assiduously to begin consideration of a bill on sexual harassment.

32. **Monsignor Gręsa** (Observer for the Holy See) said that Pope Francis had called human trafficking a crime against humanity and had urged action to combat it, including addressing the demand for sexual services. Catholic sisters around the world were helping to combat human trafficking through the Talitha Kum network and through investment in education and employment for women and girls. The Holy See condemned not only violence against women in all of its forms but also the harmful stereotypes that justified and promoted discrimination against them. In view of the catastrophic effects of domestic violence, it urged States to use every possible legal instrument to prevent it and to promote a culture of non-violence. The Pope had also condemned the "throwaway culture", which discarded babies and the elderly as troublesome or useless. Lastly, to build a bright tomorrow, ways must be found to acknowledge and support the many women who sustained and transformed families and communities.

33. **Mr. Shi** Yuefeng (China) said that uneven development was a major obstacle to the advancement

of women. Women's rights and interests should be promoted holistically, by working to eradicate poverty and encourage overall economic and social progress, and by ensuring that women and girls shared fully and equally in the fruits of development.

34. In accordance with the concepts of win-win cooperation and a community with a shared future, the developed countries should fulfil the commitments made at the Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in September 2015. They should also boost financial and technical assistance to developing countries, including capacity-building, and should step up their response to shared challenges that impeded women's development, such as climate change and the refugee and immigrant crisis.

35. All countries should adopt comprehensive measures to end violence against women. They should foster inclusive cultures, dispel and discourage anachronistic ideas and customs, and end discrimination against women. They should improve policies and legislation, strengthen monitoring and crack down on trafficking in women and girls, sexual harassment and sexual violence, and they should respond effectively to new challenges such as the misuse of the Internet and social media.

36. China had implemented national plans and programmes for women's development, had established a national mechanism to coordinate work on women and children and had adopted over 100 laws and regulations to protect women's rights. In 2016, women had accounted for 43 per cent of the national workforce and more than half of university students. Hospitalized delivery was almost universal.

37. With respect to international cooperation, China was delivering on its commitments at the Global Leaders' Meeting. In addition, it had recently hosted the second China-Arab Women's Forum and a workshop for women officials from Eastern Europe in order to deepen cooperation with women in the countries concerned. It would continue to support the work of UN-Women and other agencies, to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with other countries and to do its utmost to help developing countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

38. **Ms. Kalamwina** (Zambia) said that her country's Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015 aimed to promote gender equity and equality as a cross-cutting issue. In addition to the Women's Development Programme, which provided microcredit to vulnerable women, Zambia was currently implementing the Girls' Education, Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Project, which had already helped 15,000 extremely poor girls to pay their secondary school fees and had provided productive grants and business training for 22,000 women. Another initiative, the Agricultural Development through Value Chain Enhancement Project, would improve the livelihoods of rural women and young people.

39. Zambia promoted girls' access to education by requiring schools to enrol an equal number of girls and boys at entry level, implementing a re-entry policy and building primary and secondary schools. While gender parity had improved, girls continued to face numerous barriers, many of which were financial. In response to the number of girls dropping out at the onset of menstruation, the Government had begun distributing free sanitary towels to girls in rural and peri-urban areas.

40. **Ms. Feldman** (Australia) said that gender equality was a core Australian value. While welcoming the progress made towards gender parity in the Secretariat, she urged all United Nations agencies to deliver on their commitment to the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. The recently revealed instances of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment within the United Nations system were reprehensible. She welcomed the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance position and urged him to lead the reform of the culture underlying such unacceptable behaviours.

41. Ending violence against women and girls required coordinated, multisectoral approaches and attitudinal changes. National actions were channelled through the Government's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022, while its international efforts included contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women. Women's control over their bodies was a prerequisite for full equality and Australia had a long-standing commitment to the promotion and delivery of sexual and reproductive health services.

42. **Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the advancement of women was a global concern that required a global response. In recent years, violent extremism and terrorism had caused women and girls unimaginable suffering, and illegal unilateral sanctions, such as those imposed on her country, continued to violate the human rights of innocent citizens, with a particularly severe impact on women, children and other vulnerable groups.

43. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, girls' primary school enrolment was nearly universal, and the number of women university students continued to grow. In that connection, she wished to pay tribute to the late Maryam

Mirzakhani, the Iranian mathematician who became the first woman awarded the Fields Medal.

44. More and more positions in the executive, judiciary and legislative branches were held by women, and by the end of the sixth national development plan, at least 30 per cent of managerial positions in the public sector should be allocated to them. To provide additional legal protections, her Government was preparing a comprehensive bill on the protection of women against violence which it would soon submit to parliament. In March 2018, Iran had organized the International Event on Women, Sustainable Peace and Security in order to promote the women, peace and security agenda.

45. *Mr. Kováčik (Slovakia) took the Chair.*

46. **Mr. Bastida Peydro** (Spain) said that his country considered gender equality a domestic and international priority. At home, Spain had its first women-majority Cabinet. Its commitment to gender equality was reflected in instruments such as its 2007 Gender Equality Act and the State Pact against Gender-based Violence. Work was under way on the Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities 2018–2020, which targeted sexual exploitation and the wage gap while also promoting the training and employment of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Spain would continue to promote women's equal participation and leadership in political, economic, social and cultural life, both at home and abroad.

47. Internationally, Spain had assumed leadership on the women, peace and security agenda. After spearheading the adoption of Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) on improving implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, it had helped to launch the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network and had co-chaired the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security. It had also been one of the main sponsors of Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) on trafficking in persons in the context of armed conflict.

48. With respect to international efforts to combat violence against women, Spain was a partner in the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, supported UN-Women projects to strengthen the response to sexual violence and had contributed to the Special Appeal on Sexual Violence of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It had also actively supported the Spotlight Initiative. Spain would continue to work within the United Nations system to protect and strengthen international agreements and commitments on the human rights of women and girls and to support all efforts to fight discrimination against them.

49. **Ms. Ellertsdottir** (Iceland) said that her country had first-hand experience of the immense potential of gender equality and would continue its advocacy for women's human rights during its tenure on the Human Rights Council. Achieving gender equality by 2030 would require the support of men, especially those with the power to influence change. In fulfilment of his commitment as a HeForShe IMPACT Champion, the President of Iceland had helped to launch the Barbershop initiative, which encouraged men to assume leadership in the fight for gender equality.

50. Although Iceland consistently had the best score on the Global Gender Gap Index and the Women, Peace and Security Index, it was still working to achieve true gender equality. Most recently, it had enacted a law requiring employers to obtain equal pay certification in accordance with an equal pay standard based on International Organization for Standardization standards. It hoped to eliminate the gender pay gap by 2022.

51. **Mr. Gertze** (Namibia) said that, while women's rights were recognized in his country's Constitution and laws, achieving gender equality required buy-in and political will. By voluntarily adopting the 50-50 rule, the nation's political parties had made it possible to achieve gender parity in Parliament. In 2018, Namibia had hosted the fourth session of the Rural Women's Parliament, which aimed to foster understanding of parliamentary processes and empower rural women. Since spearheading the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), Namibia had increased the representation of women in its armed forces, police force and correctional services, making it a regional leader in that area. To promote women's economic empowerment, it had recently launched the Acceleration of Women-Owned-Enterprise Programme. Namibia was still plagued by gender-based violence and recognized the need for changes in its social norms.

52. **Mr. Ri** Song Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that women in his country participated actively political and public life on an equal footing with men. Their rights were protected by law, and great strides had been made in improving women's health, work environment and living conditions. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea cooperated closely with the international organizations that promoted women's rights and health and had presented its combined second to fourth periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in November 2017. It would continue to strive towards gender equality and women's empowerment and to strengthen international cooperation and exchange in that area.

53. Recalling that Japan continued to refuse to accept legal responsibility for the sexual enslavement of more than 200,000 Korean women during the Second World War, he called on that country to recognize its past crimes against humanity officially, apologize for them and provide sincere compensation.

54. He also called for the immediate repatriation of the 12 women abducted from the Democratic Republic of Korea by the Republic of Korea, including Ms. Kim Ryon Hui, and for publication of the investigation results, in the spirit of the Panmunjom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018.

55. **Mr. Park** Chull-Joo (Republic of Korea) said that his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the United Nations system and would continue to support efforts to enhance institutional responses. The Republic of Korea was implementing its second plan for gender equality policies, which focused on promoting gender equality awareness, closing gender gaps in the workplace and ending violence against women. It was also implementing a plan to improve women's representation in the public sector, which had resulted in a steady growth in the number of women in public employment and increased support for women who had interrupted their careers.

56. Mindful of the painful experience of the Korean "comfort women", the Republic of Korea had recently launched the Action with Women and Peace initiative, which would roll out development cooperation projects to address the needs of women and girls who had survived sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, in close cooperation with UNICEF and UNFPA. It also planned to hold an annual international conference devoted to the women, peace and security agenda.

57. **Ms. Myint** (Myanmar) said that her country was implementing a national strategic plan for the advancement of women and working with women's organizations to strengthen the role of women in society. Since 2012, the Government had been implementing a World Bank rural development project that benefited the country's many rural women. To leverage technology to empower women, it had launched the iWoman and SMART Myanmar mobile phone apps. The Government had also recently submitted a law on violence against women to parliament, and it had been conducting awareness-raising workshops on gender-based violence across the country.

58. Myanmar cooperated actively with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee on Women and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, as well as with the relevant United Nations agencies. In addition, her Government had established an independent commission of enquiry to investigate all violations of human rights committed in Rakhine State since the terrorist attack by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army in October 2016, including sexual violence. In that connection, it was currently involved in coordinating a joint communiqué with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

59. Trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, was of special concern to Myanmar, which was working closely alongside the relevant United Nations agencies and regional and international partners to combat that scourge. The Anti Trafficking in Persons Law of 2015 was being reviewed and amended to meet current challenges, and the Government was implementing its third five-year plan against human trafficking and people smuggling. It also operated reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for trafficked persons.

60. *Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan) resumed the Chair.*

61. **Mr. Panayotov** (Bulgaria) said that his country had identified gender equality as a priority of its candidature for membership of the Human Rights Council. In its own domestic polices, his Government paid special attention to improving women's participation in the labour market, reducing the gender-based differences in wages and income, fostering gender equality in decision-making processes and changing gender stereotypes. It actively promoted women's empowerment through education and was implementing numerous strategies and plans to encourage their participation in leadership, including targeted funding and measures to ensure equal treatment and equal pay for equal work. In its *Gender Gap Report 2017*, the World Economic Forum had ranked Bulgaria eighteenth among the 144 countries benchmarked.

62. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that the Sudanese Constitution guaranteed gender equality in public life. Women in the Sudan enjoyed equal pay for equal work as well as all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. The Sudan had strengthened its legislation on violence against women, adopted a national strategy to eradicate gender-based violence, and had created a specialized unit to combat violence against women and girls and a police unit for the protection of families and children. It was also creating

a database on violence against women to enhance national efforts to combat that phenomenon.

63. The Sudan had adopted a law in 2014 to combat trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, and the Government had conducted a national awareness-raising campaign to eliminate female genital mutilation, which had successfully reduced the prevalence of that practice in all parts of the country. It had also established a unit within the North Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission to support women in areas affected by conflict. Furthermore, in collaboration with relevant United Nations agencies, the Sudan Advisory Council for Human Rights in Darfur was seeking to combat early marriage, sexual violence and sexual harassment in that region and was promoting implementation of the World Health Organization guidelines for medico-legal care for victims of sexual violence. To that end, specialized training was being provided to medical personnel to help them provide appropriate assistance to victims of sexual violence. Courses on violence against women had also been held for police officers and military personnel.

64. Migration, poverty, armed conflict and certain traditional practices continued to impede the advancement of women in the Sudan and it was critical that, when drawing up plans and strategies to support Sudanese women and girls, international stakeholders adopted a comprehensive approach that took all those issues into consideration. The Sudan would continue its constructive engagement with the international community, relevant United Nations agencies and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, who had visited the country in February 2018, to further strengthen its efforts to combat violence against women and girls and ensure that their rights were fully upheld.

65. **Ms. Nguyen** Lien Huong (Viet Nam) said that Viet Nam was committed to promoting women's participation in politics, government and economic and social development at the national, regional and international levels. Domestically, it was implementing a national action programme on gender equality for the period 2016–2020, and it had recently launched a scheme to support women's business start-ups. Furthermore, since 2016, it had organized an annual action month on promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women and girls from 15 November to 15 December. She was grateful to the United Nations for its cooperation and support in implementing the One Strategic Plan 2017–2021, which gave priority to addressing all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

66. In 2017, Viet Nam had chaired the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women and the Economy Forum, which had endorsed gender inclusion guidelines for APEC. It was working closely with the other member States to mainstream gender across all ASEAN plans and programmes.

67. **Mr. Sakufi-Rumongi** (Rwanda) said that gender equality and women's empowerment had been a cornerstone of national reconstruction efforts following the 1994 genocide. Having more women in public decision-making was likely to lead to policies that benefited women, children and families in general. Thus, Rwanda fully supported the Secretary-General's system-wide strategy on gender parity, which should make the United Nations more relevant and effective.

68. Owing to efforts to encourage women's participation in government, women represented 60 per cent of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies, 45 per cent of the Cabinet and almost half of the Supreme Court. Rwanda had made significant efforts with respect to violence against women, including the establishment of one-stop centres that provided comprehensive 24-hour assistance to victims of gender-based violence. In addition, the capital city, Kigali, was a partner in the UN-Women Safe Cities programme.

69. His Government had revised the legal framework to combat trafficking in women and girls and had increased law enforcement training. Law enforcement agencies had also stepped up efforts to address human trafficking, including by increasing bilateral and multilateral ties with other law enforcement agencies, and an anti-human trafficking directorate had been established to coordinate locating and rescuing victims. Additionally, social service programmes had been instituted to identify and assist women and children at risk of trafficking. However, Rwanda continued to face challenges, which included women's limited skills and employability due to gendered roles and responsibilities, which the Government was committed to addressing.

70. **Ms. Badjie** (Gambia) said that her Government had stepped up its investment in empowering women in agriculture and the informal sector, with a particular focus on capacity-building for women entrepreneurs. In view of women's limited access to credit, a women's entrepreneurship fund would be established to provide microfinance and other forms of credit. Women and girls were the main beneficiaries of social protection interventions, which included cash transfers for poor pregnant women, family strengthening programmes and disability and health-care services. The Gambia continued to face high rates of child, early and forced

marriage as well as violence against women, including female genital mutilation, which had been banned in 2015 and was punishable by a heavy fine and up to three years in prison.

71. Implementation of the National Gender Policy 2010–2020 had led to the mainstreaming of gender as a development priority, improved health-care delivery, increased participation in decision-making and reduced gender stereotyping and discrimination. The Government continued to enforce the Women's Act, which, inter alia, protected the right of women and girls to a quality education, and remained committed to aligning domestic policy with international obligations on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

72. **Ms. Elmansouri** (Tunisia) said that the emancipation of Tunisian women had begun in 1956 with the promulgation of the Personal Status Code. Their rights had been strengthened in 2014 by the new Constitution, which enshrined the principle of gender equality, and by the withdrawal of Tunisian reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 2017, Tunisia had enacted a ground-breaking law on violence against women that prohibited physical, economic and psychological abuse. Since then, various measures had been taken to implement it, such as establishing shelters for victims, setting up special investigation units and teaching human rights and gender equality in schools. Furthermore, seven United Nations agencies and eight ministries were currently working on a joint programme to aid women victims of violence. Tunisia had recently established the Peer Council for Equality and had adopted a national plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

73. However, despite all of the above, Tunisian women continued to experience violence and discrimination, particularly in poor and rural areas. In response, the President had established a commission tasked with recommending reforms linked to individual freedoms and equality, with a view to ensuring equality for all, regardless of origin, religion, gender or gender-orientation. The commission had issued a report that was being evaluated by all stakeholders.

74. **Mr. Arbeiter** (Canada) said that his country had not achieved gender equality and was focusing on the areas where it fell short, such as equal pay for equal work and equal opportunities for indigenous women and girls. During the seventy-third session, the Committee could strengthen its work to combat child, early and forced marriage by focusing on already married girls and the kinds of support they needed, and it could begin to tackle online discrimination and violence against women by recognizing it as hate speech. With respect to the General Assembly resolutions on women, peace and security, the challenge was to ensure their implementation. The Committee had made important progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and Canada would continue to work with other Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society on that priority issue.

75. **Ms. Quiel Murcia** (Panama) said that while the movements against femicide and sexual harassment and abuse had built needed support for modern legislation and institutional changes, it was important to continue to listen to the voices of all women. The approach of Panama to the advancement of women was based on economic independence and empowerment, prevention and care for teenage pregnancies, and strengthening gender-related institutions. With respect to economic independence and empowerment, her Government had two programmes to promote women's economic independence and empowerment: one targeting food security and farming and the other providing training for women entrepreneurs. In addition, Panama had established a quota for women on corporate and public-sector boards, supported the Equal Pay International Coalition and was implementing the Gender Equality Seal.

76. Panama was working to combat human trafficking through interinstitutional coordination mechanisms and awareness-raising campaigns. It was also committed to eradicating female genital mutilation.

77. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the Israeli occupation remained the major obstacle to the advancement of Palestinian women. Five decades of violence and death had inflicted irreparable emotional damage. In six months alone, since the beginning of the Great March of Return, 180 Palestinian men, women and children had been killed and more than 17,000 had been injured.

78. Furthermore, the occupation had left Palestinian women economically disempowered. It also compromised the education of Palestinian girls, who were harassed by Israeli forces and kept from school at military checkpoints. In 2017, the schooling of almost 30,000 children had been interrupted by attacks or the threat of attacks on schools, and Israeli bombardments combined with dramatically increased settler violence had caused many parents to keep their daughters at home.

79. However, Palestinian women had shown great strength and resilience. Long active in peaceful protest,

they had participated in the Great March of Return on a scale not previously seen. They had also started non-governmental organizations, business associations and legal and counselling services to support one another in resisting the gender-specific effects of the occupation and to militate for gender equality, economic empowerment and freedom from discrimination. However, while they were working to claim their rights like women everywhere, their challenges continued to be exacerbated and entrenched by the occupation.

80. Her delegation once again called on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its flagrant violations of international law, to provide the Palestinian people with immediate international protection and to take the necessary steps to bring the half-century of occupation by Israel to an end.

81. **Ms. Bellout** (Algeria) said that the protection and promotion of women was a key objective for her Government, which had acceded to numerous international instruments on human rights and the rights of women. The principle of equality among citizens in terms of their rights and duties was enshrined in the Algerian Constitution, and all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender, were prohibited under Algerian law.

82. Without the participation of women in efforts to promote sustainable development, it would prove impossible for States to achieve any tangible progress in that area. Algeria strongly believed in the principle of equal pay for equal work and had launched numerous initiatives to promote the participation of women in national development, including a productive family scheme, a rural family scheme and a microcredit scheme that had provided microloans to over 60 per cent of women in the country. Women in Algeria comprised an increasing proportion of the national labour force, and over 50 per cent of the judiciary and of those employed in the education and health sectors. Furthermore, the authorities were obliged to promote gender parity when appointing staff to senior management positions at all public institutions.

83. To safeguard women, their property and their financial resources, all forms of violence against them, including domestic violence, sexual and verbal abuse and psychological and economic coercion or violence were prohibited under the Criminal Code. The penalties for familial neglect and sexual harassment in public places had been strengthened and a national fund established to provide support to divorced women with small children. Algeria also awarded a prize every year on 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to associations and individuals that had made a particularly significant contribution towards ending all violence against women and girls.

84. **Mr. Onanga Ndjila** (Gabon) said that his country was a party to almost all instruments intended to improve gender equality and had made advancing the status of women a national priority. In 2007, the Government had established the Ministry of the Family and the Observatory for Women's Rights and Parity, and, in 2010, it had instituted a social protection and mandatory health insurance scheme. Since the beginning of the Gabonese Women's Decade in 2015, Parliament had passed a law establishing a 30 per cent quota for women and young candidates in parliamentary elections. At the international level, Gabon had sponsored General Assembly resolution 65/189 establishing International Widow's Day.

Organization of work

85. **The Chair** recalled that, on 2 October 2018, at the first meeting of the Committee, the delegation of Burundi had proposed that a legal opinion be sought regarding the legal basis for the inclusion of the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi in the Committee's list of special procedure mandate holders authorized to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session; and the legal basis for the Commission's dialogue with the Committee in view of paragraph 22 of Human Rights Council resolution 39/14 of 28 September 2018. The Secretary of the Committee had advised that only the Committee could request such an opinion. The Committee had subsequently deferred its decision to extend invitations to the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and to the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia. On 4 October 2018, the Permanent Mission of Burundi had transmitted to the Chair of the Committee the text of its request for a legal opinion, which had subsequently been circulated to delegations on 5 October 2018.

86. **Mr. Charwath** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that Human Rights Council resolution 36/19 requested the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi to present the final report during an interactive dialogue at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly; Human Rights Council resolution 39/14 did not nullify that request. The Committee could not pick and choose which requests to respect and which to set aside. While the European Union and its member States would not formally object to the request for a legal opinion, they regretted that it would further delay the invitation and therefore requested that the opinion be delivered as expeditiously as possible.

87. **Ms. Abdelkawy** (Egypt), supported by **Mr. Abdahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic), said that any formal request from a Member State to the Secretariat for a legal opinion or for further information should be respected and processed as soon as it was received, without the need for Committee approval or consideration. It was the prerogative and duty of the Chair to guarantee that requests and concerns expressed by Member States were addressed, and the Secretariat must provide the necessary information before consideration of the matter in the Committee. Failure to do so could be perceived as infringing on the right of Member States to request information or clarification from the Secretariat. The Chair should therefore forward the request immediately to the Office of Legal Affairs.

88. **Mr. Sparber** (Liechtenstein), speaking also on behalf of Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland, said that although all Member States had the right to seek a legal opinion from the Office of Legal Affairs, there was no need for a formal request in the situation at hand. There was no legal reason why the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi should be excluded from the interactive dialogues with the Committee. The Secretary had explained the legal basis for the selected list of special procedure mandate holders and other experts scheduled to make presentations to the Third Committee at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. Their respective delegations appreciated the interactive discussions with the mandate holders and saw no reason for questioning that practice.

89. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her delegation wished to know why the interactive dialogue with the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi had not been included in the initial list of mandate holders. She asked whether there was a clear rule that obliged the Committee as a whole to approve the sending of a request for a legal opinion, and whether a country had the right to do so individually.

90. **Ms. Korac** (United States of America) said that her delegation did not believe there was a basis for seeking a legal opinion, particularly by one Member State. According to the rules of procedure, any legal opinion must be sought by the Committee as a whole and not by a single Member State from the floor of the Committee.

91. **Mr. Shingiro** (Burundi) said that, at the current time, the Committee only needed to discuss the text before it, as the issue of the request had already been discussed at a previous meeting. Given that the legitimate right of Burundi to request a legal opinion had been settled, the request should be sent and all delegations must abide by the opinion delivered.

92. **Mr. Kashaev** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation fully supported the request of Burundi, as States had the right to request an opinion from the Office of Legal Affairs. Given the various interpretations of the relevant Human Rights Council resolution, clarification should be sought.

93. **Mr. Castillo Santana** (Cuba) said that his delegation supported the request of the delegation of Burundi. Firstly, there should be no confusion between a request made to the International Court of Justice, which required plenary approval, and a request for a legal opinion from the Office of Legal Affairs. Burundi had every right to make such a request without the intervention of other delegations and it was the responsibility of the Secretariat to carry out that request.

94. **Mr. Shi** Yuefeng (China) said that his delegation believed that Burundi was entitled to request a legal opinion from the Office of Legal Affairs.

95. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) said that any Member State could request a legal opinion, but the decision to transmit that request to the Office of the Legal Counsel must be undertaken the Committee or another intergovernmental body. Any request for a legal opinion from a United Nations intergovernmental body must be the result of a decision, not necessarily by consensus, by the requesting body. He disagreed with the assertions of certain delegations that it was the prerogative of any Member State to request a legal opinion. While it was true that any delegation could send a request, that request would only have effect if the relevant intergovernmental body had agreed thereto, either through consensus or pursuant to a vote.

96. **Ms. Korac** (United States of America) asked whether the decision to request a legal opinion would be unanimously adopted if her delegation did not request a recorded vote.

97. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) said that absent a formal request for a vote, he presumed that the Committee would adopt the motion by consensus.

98. **Ms. Korac** (United States of America) said that, in that case, her delegation wished to request a vote on the decision to request a legal opinion.

99. **Mr. Khashaan** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation supported the request made by Burundi. The Committee should seize the opportunity to enhance cooperation on human rights issues and implement the principle of transparency.

100. **Ms. Abdelkawy** (Egypt), supported by **Mr. Castillo Santana** (Cuba), said that the proposal to put the matter to a vote would set a bad precedent.

101. **Mr. Shingiro** (Burundi) said that his delegation did not understand how delegations that claimed to support the rule of law could seek to prevent another delegation from exercising its legitimate right to request a legal opinion. If the Committee did not wish to create a dangerous precedent, it should allow the request for a legal opinion to proceed.

102. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the fact that there had been very few instances in which United Nations intergovernmental bodies had requested a legal opinion was in and of itself significant. While such requests had been made in the past, for example by the Fifth Committee at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Third Committee had never done so before and therefore a precedent would in fact be created if it decided to seek a legal opinion. In view of the late hour, his recommendation would be to proceed with the requested vote.

103. **Mr. Shingiro** (Burundi), supported by **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco), **Ms. Abdelkawy** (Egypt) and **Mr. Castillo Santana** (Cuba), said that a vote should not be taken before the Secretariat had informed the Committee of the rule stipulating that a legal opinion could only be sought by the Committee as a whole.

104. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) said that there was no procedural rule as such. According to long-standing practice at the United Nations, legal opinions were issued by the Legal Counsel only at the request of an intergovernmental body and not at the request of an individual Member State or group of Member States.

105. **The Chair** said that, owing to time constraints, the vote would be postponed until the afternoon meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.